

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness e-newsletter

Reporting on Innovative Solutions to End Homelessness

06.08.06

INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES: KING COUNTY AND THE CITY OF SEATTLE AIM FOR A HUMANE AND ECONOMICALLY RESPONSIBLE SOLUTION TO CHRONIC INEBRIATES



As a 10-year regional plan to end chronic homelessness in King County, Washington was nearing county approval in 2004, a planning committee member told United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Philip Mangano, *"I want what is best for my community and we want real solutions for homeless people."* During his recent trip to Washington State (see related story), Director Mangano had an opportunity to visit one of the "real solutions for homeless people" that has been implemented in King County-the 1811 Eastlake supportive housing project in Seattle's Denny Triangle neighborhood, owned and operated by the [Downtown Emergency Service Center](#).

Residents of the 75-unit 1811 Eastlake project are long term homeless men and women with chronic alcohol addiction, sometimes referred to as chronically homeless public inebriates, who have been referred to the project by County human service and health officials because of their high utilization of emergency, criminal justice, and other publicly funded services. Once admitted to the project, residents have access to daily meals, laundry facilities, a registered nurse, case management and payee services, and state licensed mental health and substance abuse treatment. The location of the project adjacent to downtown facilitates access to a variety of supportive services that can complement the onsite services. Residents sign a lease and are required to pay rent based on income. While sobriety is encouraged but not required to maintain tenancy, residents who repeatedly break the "good neighbor" provision of their lease may be evicted.

The unique housing model at 1811 Eastlake includes 49 fully furnished studio apartments and semi private cubicle housing for 26 persons arranged in a congregate style setting facilitating interaction between case managers, counselors and the resident. A private donation of Native American artwork helps to create a welcoming atmosphere. Explaining the congregate setting, Downtown Emergency Center Director Bill Hobson describes how the setting permits monitoring and allows case managers to easily interact to develop trust with the residents and try to "

encourage, cajole and coax " them into treatment. Generally, residents at 1811 Eastlake had been homeless, addicted to alcohol for at least 15 years, and had failed to remain sober even after participating in as many as six abstinence-required treatment programs.

It's much cheaper to have them in housing like 1811 Eastlake than in emergency rooms. according to the King County Department of Community and Human Services Department. In 2000, the top 20 utilizers of drug and alcohol crisis services cost the County in excess of \$1 million in crisis response. If associated costs of police time, legal services during court appearances, and inpatient hospital stays were factored in, the costs were about \$100,000 per person in that one year.

Construction and operating funds for the \$11.2 million, 4-story project, which opened in December 2005, was provided by the City of Seattle, King County, the State of Washington including low income housing tax credits through the state housing finance agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Supportive Housing Program, and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Seattle. As residents begin to access emergency systems of care and the criminal justice system less frequently, city and county officials expect savings to those systems will accrue eventually offsetting the costs of operating 1811 Eastlake, thus providing not only a humane response to their homelessness but also reducing the economic consequences on the community.

A grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is funding an evaluation of the first three years of the project's operation, examining the relationship between residing in such a supportive housing arrangement and variables related to quality of life and reduced use of crisis services. The comprehensive evaluation is a joint project of the Downtown Emergency Service Center and the Addictive Behaviors Research Center at the University of Washington with data support from the County.

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